

Color and Graphic Contrast in Traditional Albanian Wardrobe



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Abstract

In this study we will discuss one of the most popular issue and with great interest in the Albanian material culture. At function, for the changes to this study are considered the developing background of the traditional clothing and morphological changes that it has undergone from one era to another. Firstly, our study concentrates in the historical durability of dressing in order to understand how much original is that which is presented in the analysis and secondly, its value in terms of figurative form and its aesthetic values. It is interesting to note that within the stylistic values of material culture are shown varicolored qualities of the visual language and its adapting forms. It is for this reason that the analysis on Albanian traditional dressing with its expressive appearance is based on the examples that historically is living longer and as such has deep costumographic content. Dressing with xhubleta is one of the most typical cases in the history of the Albanian wardrobe in territory of north Albania. Another wearing with such an open historic scope was the kilt, which originally stretched in all Albanian territory. In the 20th century, dressing with the kilt and xhubleta were replaced by the casual suit.

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Ethnic phenomena of one nation are defined by various manifestations of material and spiritual culture. Wearing undoubtedly constitutes the most important elements of this culture. Not only in the context of material culture, but also in its specificity it presents individualizing features. These attributes are expressed in the form of art, the decorative character of color and physiognomy of costumographic character. The morphology of wearing, in all its derivational aspects reflects national peculiarities of every nation. In this sense the traditional clothing are considered which come from the depths of centuries, which have won an ethnic feature through regional and cultural diversity, the thing which differs them from other people's wearings. As a typical and the most ancient Albanian dress is presented the one with xhubletë, a skirt with an open end and in the form of corrugated bell. It was made by belts and felt pieces, with an intricate cut that required a great workmanship in tailoring. Unreplicated form and original ornamentics give to it distinctive features and aesthetic values.

It is a thousand-year traditional clothing and it is evidenced by various archaeological findings in the ancient world of Crete, Mycenae and other Mediterranean countries.¹ Its monumental appearance comes as a dynamic interaction of the form with the environment and with the visual expression. In contrast to the classic principle of the dressing that is freely falling on the body and exhibits the natural beauty of the female body, xhubleta was evolving into other lines of an original character.

Wide opening underneath was distinguish by a white strip from felt that was forming a visible varicolored binder. Besides the practical role that could have this visible binder in an aesthetic or artistic aspect was making it more distinctive its corrugated shape of xhubleta and simultaneously, its contrasting appearance. From the waist down *xhubleta* is made with felt generations with an unspecified number in function of its height. These generations were held horizontally in the form of successive strips around it. The finding of this horizontal way by the popular costumographer, was proving among others and the value of color and graphic of this ornament. Dressing with xhubleta was distinguished by its clarity and laconic manner of embellishment. An ornament that was specified for its style, the line and in a more general sense, visual, and for general tone in color. Besides that, ornamentics in horizontal bands was assessed and for a more inclusive and distinctive quality in the popular and decorative rustic art.² Ornaments on the head, the neck, especially on the chest, in dressing with xhubleta had a role and artistic importance. In bridal dressing with xhubleta, on the head was worn the red or white scarf that created expressive contrasts with dark dressing; arms are left usually quiet, unadorned.

The costume with xhubleta wasn't distinguished only by its outside appearance that was unique and very original, but also by its cutting that except its special shape, was creating an imposing view of the monumental nature. By the same reasoning it can be said for the technical implementation process that is considered as complicated as it was cutting and sewing.

Decoration motives in xhubleta were settling in horizontal and in some tight spaces. To the front part of the suit (opening) was added a decorated piece of a textile with a black field or a color of a brick and some simple motifs with golden and silver threads, or with purple, cherry and orange colors. Such a xhubleta was called "red xhubleta" and was worn only by married women, as they were young, unlike "white xhubleta" which was worn by the girls and "black xhubleta" which was worn the older women. Colors which were prevalent with xhubleta in the 19th century were except with white color, they were also with the color of the tile and with different nuances. Xhubleta that were worn after World War I, were almost all black and their wearing has remained as a ceremonial dressing for the day of the wedding, or holidays in a limited region of the country as it was with Northern Albania.

Another typical Albanian dressing is the kilt. The origin of this dressing is related to the type of dress "dalmatika" or "fustani" that is documented since the 5th-6th century BC and was worn by the Illyrians. The old name of this item of clothing is not known with precision, but is certain that it has been called "fustan" at least since the 14th century. A dress or a kilt, as men's clothing, till the early beginning of the 20th century was worn almost across the whole Albania, with local minor unimportant differences from one province to another. "Its spreading is illustrated best in one of the manifestations of the unitary character of our folk culture in 18-19 centuries and as such should be evaluated as one of the manifestations of the specifics of our people in relation to other people," says the researcher A.Gjergji in the study "Classification of Albanian Dressing".³ From the structural point of view, the kilt consisted of a wide end with bandages that went up towards the waist and going down to the knees. It was white in color, with a few exceptions and its height was differing from one province to another. Kilts down to the knees were worn usually by boys, young men and the komits, and those long ones up to the calves were worn by noble men of Shkodra until the Declaration of Independence.

To be more concrete with the historical fact, dressing with the kilt till the early beginning of the 20th century is worn by men almost throughout the country from south to north, often with other types of dressing that were worn in special areas. In the 19th century the use of the kilt in the north, according to numerous testimonies of the time, was stretching from Shkodra to Novi Pazar and from there down to the south to the Albanian regions in Macedonia. It is to be noted that in that century mentioned, in some areas there were some features about the use of the dressing with the kilt. Besides the provinces where the dress kilts were serving as dressing for all social strata, there were also provinces where it had been dressing of differentiated strata of the society. The kilts of these strata recognized its blooming stage and simultaneously, with the time difference, its declining phase. Those of the south, in general, were shorter than those of the north. Longer kilts were worn by the noble men of Shkodra by the end of the 19th century, also they are shown by many pictures of Marubi, taken in Shkodra.⁴

The kilt that accounted almost dressing of men of the whole southern provinces of Albania in the early 20th century until the beginning of World War I, was presented with the varied particularity in finding the shape and aesthetic sense of impression. There were no lacks of big shapes of the shirt, kilt or skirts in white colors in this costumographic construction, white hoses and white vest with fake sleeves, scarfs and Albanian leather shoes like moccasins with ornaments and contrast colors, multiple scarfs of the waist generation which were taking part and created rich and plastic movements. This was a well-rounded plasticity of large areas of white or black dress and its graphic rhythm. There was not only this aspect that attracted the attention of a

graphic impression or the color, but also the epic spirit of this simple majesty that was followed by a joyful feeling of the light which generated the color as such.

As costumographic shape, wearing kilt, with its whiteness and shapeniess, enabled to the Albanian man, except his elegant appearance in walking also the energetic movement with expressive character. This kind of expression fell more in the eye of the culmination moments of the dynamic movement. Wearing the kilt, except its spread in the Albanian territory, has been seen to be worn in Arbëresh of Greece and Italy, and as an Albanian influence, it has become popular in other nations of Southeast Europe. Furthermore, this costume or wardrobe, as typical of Albanians over the centuries 14th-17th, was known in different countries of Western Europe. "Life expectancy" of this dress, as noted above, was going up to the World War I. After that time it has come out of use and is replaced by other suits such as thick and woolen brekesha in central Albania and with the use of poture in some countries as in Mallakastër, Myzeqe, Labëri and elsewhere.

While wearing the kilt during the 20th century until its release from the use was typical of men's clothing of southern Albania, the case is not with women's dress of the same region. In the above description, the kilt comes as a dress with full dynamic rhythm and full with the warmth of light. A light that radiates full Mediterranean intensity and it is exposed as unique phenomenon. In women's dress of southern Albania quite opposite is happening, there it dominates the costumography of dark colors and with regional differences from one country to another. Such a distinction is underlined in a traditional costume of Dardha, which is separated from other regions of the south, and which does not hide the use of dark colors, but it looks at them combined with the shape and contrast of the graphic rhythm. Colors of the traditional suit of Dardha in the district of Korca are used with professional requirements and in accordance with the combination of other elements of the structure of this costumography. The red part of this dress which possessed a proportionate measure to this dress was almost in balance with its dark part. The red color, in theory of the color is one of the colors that has greater wave length after the yellow color. Therefore, its intensity, in terms of the strength of the light, is quite large. Even in the artistic and aesthetic sense, decorative surfaces are affected by shiny metal decorations, from the lips of the turned white shirt on the chest and the handkerchief that dardharja hanged it on the belt during the popular and family ceremony. The organization, as in this case of the major surfaces of bright and dark color, accounted in general a distinctive feature of the popular composition. Also the lace together with the sequins of the turned shirt has served as a decorative element but also ornamental, covering it in the ornamental sense the breast of the bride from Dardha.⁵

Following the popular dress with special features of expression is also that with *Tirq*, in some cases as in Shkodra, this dressing it held besides the one with the kilt. This information, among others, prove the pictures of the last 19th century. Dressing with *Tirq* was generally an attractive and elegant, with tight trousers of white felt were almost fitting that after the legs. The uniqueness that stands out strongly in this dress is the graphic contrast which created the black purl on the white background of felt, which adorned the stitching part around the pockets and the space between them. The highest number of black cord fibers used for decoration had the *tirq* of social upper class. But the most famous and decorated *tirq* with black braid were those of Elbasan. Recognizing that suit with *tirq* incorporating the provincial expressive features, we can perceive it in some groups. One of these groups accounted *zonatku* *tirq* of white felt and with black lacing were accompanied by short *xhurdine* of black felt shirt and with short sleeves and with thick tufts of axonal wool adorned the sides of *xhurdi*, the collar, the front part of the collar and the shoulders. From the professional viewpoint, this type of *tirq* stay at a higher level in terms of aesthetic beautifying treatment. Areas containing this combination form of dress were the districts of Shkodra, Mirdita, Elbasan, Tirana, Durrës and Krujë.

Contrary happens in the district of Dibra and partly in the district of Kukes, where tirq were held white or black, but not as tight as those of Shkodra and had less ornate. Apart the shirt and the vest in this dress was applied a form called "kaporanie" which was nothing but a jacket characteristic of felt generally black, with short sleeves over the elbow and with a big collar that formed a hood, which it had practical effect to protect against rain. This type of jacket was presented with some differences from xhurdia of the first group. Kaporania, or the extension of this dress was reaching to the waist and did not contain any ornate or bundles, neither fringe nor with lace in the collar. The vest in this dress was made from the red piece and adorned with black lace that made them distinct from other areas. In this composition of Dibra's men dress were seen brightly and clearly the huge masses of black and white contrast.

One other group consisted variants of Kosovo, the regions of Tropoja and Puka. Even here tirq were held generally white with the black braid. These tirq were accompanying the doublet from the white felt that was a bit shorter than kaporania and longer than xhurdia. The latter was not previously used in Puke. It is believed that it came from the districts of Tirana and Kruja and spread rapidly to the northeast of the country. Dressing with Tirq in the 20th century was spreading into areas which previously were not held. This suit also came across in the southern part of the country, specifically in the district of Berat where tirq of white felt were embroidered in the sewing parts and in the lap with the black lacing. In historical terms, dressing with tirq can be seen as a replacement dress of the kilt, despite the entry into use of other dressing, the upper layers of citizens, were bearing this clothing to go out, the costume with the kilt.

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